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17 October 2023

Honourable Lindiwe Daphane Zulu
National Minister for Social Development
Email: minister@dsd.gov.za ; lzulu@parliament.gov.za

CC: Mr Linton Mchunu
Acting Director General
National Department of Social Development
Email: LintonM@dsd.gov.za

RE: Gauteng Provincial Department of Social Development's directive regarding baby savers

Dear Minister Zulu

The Gauteng Provincial Department of Social Development's (DSD) directive dated 4 October 2023 entitled: "*Illegal baby baskets services – services offered by CYCCs and private temporary safe care homes*", to all Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCs) and child protection NGOs who operate baby savers to immediately halt and shut down this life saving intervention, has condemned abandoned babies to their death.

The premise for the directive could not be further from the truth and ignores the meticulous protocols child protection organisations ascribe to when utilising baby savers as a mechanism of safe relinquishment.

Contra to the directive, baby savers do not compromise the protection of children nor does it encourage infant abandonment. An infant cannot be denied "a family name, identity, cultural and religious practice" nor reunited with family relatives if said infant is dead, abandoned unsafely in open fields, pit latrines, or public restrooms as South Africa has witnessed on numerous occasions.

The directive missed a crucial point in that the rights of children as per the South African Constitution Section 28 can only be executed, if the child's right to life as per Section 11 is first and foremost secured. Enforcing this directive will abolish an infant's right to life through unsafe infant abandonment which also violates Section 10, an infant's right to human dignity.

Baby savers fill a necessary gap in the child protection system. A gap left by government's worsening financial constraints to employ more social workers, increase funding to NGOs as well as increase the value of the child support grant to be in line with the food poverty line as recently recommended by a study commissioned by your department, *Reducing Child Poverty: A review of child poverty and the value of the child support grant*.

Desperate mothers are turned away from their families, police stations, public hospitals and social workers when attempting to safely handover their infants, which due to various reasons, they can no longer care for. A prime example was in October 2022 when a 23-year-old mother from Verulam KZN abandoned her 3-month-old baby along a stream in Dawncrest and left a note detailing how on two occasions, social workers failed her and her baby and that the 'system' is fragile.

This gap in the child protection system and a detailed explanation of how baby savers operate was well ventilated during the public hearings on the Children Amendment Bill as well as the need to strengthen the voice of biological fathers.

Enforcing this directive will remove a thin safety net for unwanted infants via registered and vetted child protection NGOs and give rise to illegal and black-market criminal organisations as child trafficking becomes more prevalent.

I appeal to you, as the National Minister for Social Development, to request MEC Mbali Hlophe to urgently withdraw this directive which condemns infants to cruel and inhumane abandonment, which evidence has shown, will likely lead to their death.

This directive is a senseless and heartless attack on defenceless infants and I appeal for your urgent intervention in this matter.

Let us always remember the teachings of the late President Nelson Mandela: *"The true character of a society is revealed in how it treats its children."*

Thank you

Sincerely,

A.L.A. Abrahams

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